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Protection By Presence: Protection by Presence for Policymakers

Tommaso Fornai and Marcos Knoblauch

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Protection by Presence for Policymakers

Introduction

Engaging with policymakers on Protection by Presence (PbyP) issues is often complex, influenced by a range of intersecting factors. Advocacy, at its core, is a form of human interaction, shaped by both rational and emotional dynamics, that unfolds within the space where interests, power, and values intersect. These interactions are further constrained or enabled by institutional frameworks, geopolitical contexts, both circumstantial and long-standing, and other contextual realities.

Within this framework, advocacy plays a central and indispensable role in the implementation of the PbyP strategy for several key reasons. First, advocacy is essential for generating political costs for potential aggressors. By doing so, it contributes to the dissuasive and deterrent effects that are vital for effective protection. On one hand, advocacy helps build a robust support network, enhancing the reputation, perceived legitimacy of the protection effort and credibly capable of responding to security incidents. This, in turn, increases its ability to influence a wide range of actors. On the other hand, targeted advocacy, at both local and national levels, helps disseminate key messages in the field, including to potential aggressors, reinforcing the deterrent impact. Second, advocacy is a powerful tool for engaging and applying pressure on other relevant actors (whether states, institutions, or civil society organizations) to take responsibility for the protection of civilians or to actively participate in the broader protection strategy. Finally, advocacy is also crucial for maintaining strong relationships with donors. Sustained and strategic communication with funding partners is necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of PbyP interventions.

For the purpose of this document, policymakers are individuals, agencies or institutions with the authority to create, implement, and modify laws, regulations, and practices that impact human rights standards and protections. These may include government officials, members of parliaments, diplomats, heads of international organizations, or leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate for human rights. Though illegal armed actors are not policymakers nor implement policies, this document addresses cases involving such actors.

The objective of this document is to discuss good practices, identify challenges, and provide tips and examples deemed useful when developing an advocacy strategy in the context of a Protection by Presence intervention (prior or during). In that sense, this document is not an advocacy manual and will be circumscribed to the scope described.

Designing an advocacy strategy

Identify the issue: this represent the first natural step to be addressed. This step involves clearly defining the specific challenge or opportunity that requires attention or intervention. The range is wide: from gaining political support and visibility to establishing a new partnership

with a donor; from promoting the implementation of public policies on civilian protection to enabling access to schools for children or addressing military forces to prevent IHL infractions and harm to civilians.

Define the goals: Though it is usually an iterative process, the following step is to define the goals, while keeping solid feet on the ground to distinguish what is achievable from what is simply impossible with the available resources. There are many possible and different objectives, which is why it is necessary to clearly define what is being sought. For example, it could be funding for a project, it could be opening spaces for action on the ground for the implementing organisation or for the local community, or it could be pushing for the elaboration of a public protection policy that will enable greater sustainability. Goals need to be **clear** and **achievable**:

A **clear goal**:

- **unequivocal cause-effect:** though political systems are not predictable nor deterministic, there should be a well-reasoned hypothesis of action. In other words, from a *system thinking* approach¹, the reinforcing and balancing loops are strongly supported on evidence, reasonable and the available information can prove the concept.
- **An appealing change:** The goal should promote a socio-political change aligned with a common good or core values shared by the policymakers. Additionally, this change must fall within their sphere of concern and power.
- **Lasting impacts:** the more sustainable the result is, the clearer it becomes to the stakeholders.

Achievable goals are the result of an adequate combination of multiple factors:

- **Realism:** whilst avoiding being overly optimistic to the point of impracticality, the goals should be grounded in reality. This includes having or creating enough leverage, the current (geo)political constraints, amongst others.
- **Resources allocation:** achieving a goal requires resources that are subjected to limits and restrictions.
- **Support networks:** though the alliances can be considered a resource, the political capital of support networks is unquantifiable, and may determine the likelihood of achieving the goal.

Amongst the possible goals for a PbyP intervention, **creating political cost** for violent actors is a common one. In the context of advocacy directed toward policymakers in PbyP initiatives, one of the objectives may be to generate political cost. This can be achieved through two main approaches: strengthening the implementing organisation's support network and advocating to stakeholders with legal responsibilities to protect human rights and civilian populations.

¹ Systems thinking is a way of understanding and analysing complex problems by looking at the whole system rather than focusing only on individual parts. It emphasizes the relationships, patterns, and interactions between components within a system, recognizing that the behaviour of the whole cannot always be understood by analysing the parts in isolation. More information here: <https://thesystemsthinker.com/introduction-to-systems-thinking/>

A strong and wide-reaching support network is vital for several reasons. Most importantly, it enables an effective response to security incidents affecting protected communities. The more robust and extensive the network, including international organisations, embassies, civil society, UN agencies, and international institutions, the greater the deterrent effect on potential aggressors. Prioritising relationship-building with these actors from the outset is essential. Early engagement should ensure they understand and trust the organisation's work and are willing to support it publicly. Building such alliances is a long-term process that requires consistent effort. Trust must be cultivated over time through effective communication, participation in relevant events, and shared initiatives. Developing close relationships with key stakeholders should be seen as part of a broader, gradual strategy.

In parallel, generating political cost involves **sustained communication with institutions that hold protective responsibilities**, such as local authorities, national governments, ministries, national army and, when applicable, foreign military forces in cases of occupation. Advocacy efforts should raise the organisation's visibility and highlight its political leverage, especially by demonstrating the strength of its support network. This visibility is important in two key ways: first, when addressing actors responsible for human rights violations, it serves as a reminder of applicable legal frameworks (International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, Refugee Law, and national legislation) and the consequences of continued violations. Second, when engaging with actors tasked with protection, it emphasises their responsibility to act and the risks of neglecting their obligations. As with the support network, maintaining ongoing engagement is essential to apply consistent pressure and ensure continued attention to protection and human rights issues.

Stakeholder mapping

The goals and the stakeholders' power need to exist in the same political space. This means that the advocacy goals must reside within the reach of power of the stakeholders². In that sense, defining the advocacy goals filters out actors who have nothing to offer, whilst it makes evident what new relationships are needed and what support networks could be useful.

Finding relevant policymakers are those who have enough power and the position to enter a conversation on the specific goal. It is not always about reaching the highest authority but the right balance between who holds enough power to provoke some change and who has the interest to do it, especially in hierarchical structures. Hence, it is also fundamental to understand the dynamics that connect the different actors. This means understanding who has the power to influence whom, whether there is a hierarchical relationship between some of them (e.g. Ministry of Defence with the army of a given country), or who may not yet have a direct connection but has an interest in establishing one.

Reaching out to policymakers may become a challenge by itself. Of all the mapped actors, some will be within the political reach of the implementing organisation. If an out-of-reach

² In other words, do not ask for what they are unable to give you (unless that is the negotiation strategy).

policymaker is considered relevant, then a strategy to approach them will be needed, for example, through intermediary actors—such as support networks—who are within reach.

Creating the differential leverage through allies may tilt the negotiation table subtly, but effectively, and prepare the stakeholder to adopt a more empathetic attitude. By bringing allies on board, you can quietly influence the balance of power in a discussion, making it more likely that policymakers will listen with empathy and consider your position seriously.

Tools and tactics

Advocacy can be seen as a win-win (collaborative) negotiation rather than a distributive negotiation. The challenge resides in finding and properly presenting or suggesting the potential gain to the policymaker. These gains for policymakers could include accessing to substantive information for their work, the mere satisfaction of complying with their obligations, more visibility and increased reputation among peers, a positive international image, a promotion within their institution or higher positions, or showing their constituents their integrity and interest in social issues, among others.

In that sense, goals can be defined in different levels of satisfaction, expanding the possibilities of successful outcomes of an advocacy strategy. For example, an organization needs funding to implement a PbyP intervention alongside a humanitarian intervention in a certain location. The organisation develops an advocacy strategy oriented toward obtaining the financial support. The results of the advocacy strategy do not depend solely on the actions carried out, but on the political moment, geopolitical circumstances, financial restrictions, among many others. In that sense, the organization could profit from defining a multi-level goal matrix as follows:

- **optimal goal:** achieving the best result planned. For example, obtain financial support meeting the needs (time and amount).
- **positive goal:** achieving a substantial result. For example, a stakeholder offers less than needed, plus political support to find other financial sources.
- **minimum goal:** nothing substantial is obtained, but support to achieve the higher-level goals. For example, the stakeholder can only commit to political support and visibility.

Any results below the minimum goal means that the advocacy strategy rendered unsatisfactory results. It is also possible to achieve results beyond the optimal planned level or achieve a positive goal that was not foreseen³.

Align with policymaker's priorities: Effective advocacy requires a clear understanding of a policymaker's priorities and political context. Before engaging, it is essential to analyse their point of view on protection, conflict dynamics, and humanitarian issues. PbyP should be framed in a way that aligns with these priorities, for example, highlighting its contribution to civilian

³ Every advocacy activity can be viewed as a form of negotiation. Therefore, it is advisable to have an understanding on negotiation principles and key tools, such as PIN analysis, to develop an effective advocacy strategy. This knowledge helps ensure that your efforts are well-prepared, strategic, and more likely to succeed.



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protection, peacebuilding, or community resilience. Using language and framing that resonates with the policymaker's existing agenda can significantly increase receptiveness. This alignment does not mean compromising PbyP's core values but rather presenting its relevance in a politically coherent and compelling way, enhancing its legitimacy and potential for policy-level support.

Define PbyP and engage with data and evidence. When advocating for PbyP, concepts and ideas need to be clearly defined in accessible terms, addressing common misconceptions and highlighting its unique, nonviolent approach to civilian protection. A good practice is using concrete evidence of impact to support the explanation, including well-structured internal reports, robust M&E data, public statements from beneficiary communities, and findings from independent or governmental sources. A strong MEAL system is crucial to generate credible, actionable data. It is advisable to complement data with practical examples, such as stories of change that illustrate how PbyP has made a measurable difference and, when possible, selecting cases that align with the policymaker's strategic interests or current policy priorities. Beneficiaries may be interested in sharing their personal testimonies with policymakers, which most certainly can help humanise the issue and foster emotional engagement, bridging the gap between policy discussions and lived experiences.

Finally, present endorsements or collaborative efforts from well-known and respected organisations, particularly those trusted by or close to the targeted policymaker. This adds legitimacy and reinforces the relevance of PbyP within broader protection efforts.

Building and rely on the support network. An effective support network is a key asset in strengthening advocacy efforts and enhancing the political positioning of an organisation implementing PbyP. This network not only increases legitimacy and political cost but also helps to amplify key messages and apply coordinated pressure where needed. Support networks are also essential for the development of strong advocacy strategies. By sharing information, aligning goals, and coordinating actions, the network can help shape a more coherent and persuasive approach to engaging policymakers. Organisations should actively cultivate these relationships and involve the network in joint planning, messaging, and public positioning, ensuring that advocacy is both collaborative and impactful. Also, it is essential not only to establish relationships with relevant stakeholders but also to ensure their continuous development and maintenance over time.

Prepare and submit clear, concrete, and practical requests: The manner in which requests are presented to policymakers can significantly influence the success of the advocacy strategy. It is crucial to know how to construct a well-formulated proposal and how to present it effectively, in order to capture attention quickly and motivate the recipient to engage more deeply with the issue or support the cause. Below are some key suggestions and best practices:

- Clearly state the expectations and needs of the request: The request should be formulated in a simple, clear, and concrete manner. The proposal must address a specific problem and be directed to individuals who have the authority and capacity to take action and implement change. Targeting a general audience can be ineffective, as it fails to hold any specific actor accountable. It is also advisable to avoid vague or

general proposals, or presenting numerous proposals in the form of a list. In both cases, this approach fails to capture attention and allows room for different interpretations or evasion of the issue.

- Provide contextual information: Background information should be succinct, clear, and easily understandable for the audience who are, most likely, unfamiliar with these issues. Its primary function is to justify the proposal and help the audience understand the urgency and necessity of the request.
- Support the proposal with material: It is always advisable to prepare a written document—a brief summary of the request or proposal—to hand out to policymakers and their teams for review and consideration⁴. Additionally, understanding the most effective communication channel for the audience is key. For instance, if the audience is younger, materials shared via social media may be more effective.
- Maintain a positive and open attitude: Attitude plays a critical role in the success of the advocacy strategy. Although policymakers may hold political positions that differ significantly from those of the implementing organizations, the attitude should always be conciliatory rather than critical. Opening a meeting with criticism of the stakeholder will likely hinder productive dialogue. Similarly, arriving with a sense of moral superiority can create tensions and reduce the space for constructive engagement.

Engagement with International Norms and Standards: In advocacy efforts, especially within the PbyP framework, it is essential to have a deep understanding of both national and international legal frameworks relevant to the context in which an organisation operates. Equally important is knowing how to effectively leverage these frameworks to support advocacy goals. Whether aiming to generate political cost for an actor, build strategic alliances, or influence public policy, grounding advocacy in solid legal references can significantly affect the success of both individual engagements and broader strategies.

The first step is to identify which legal frameworks apply to the actor being targeted. This involves assessing which international instruments the actor has ratified or expressed interest in, as well as recognising the socio-political dynamics that may make certain legal frameworks particularly influential. Once identified, specific legal provisions from these instruments should be used to strengthen the implementing organisation’s claims.

These legal tools can be powerful instruments to pressure states or actors to take protective measures, such as investigating threats, implementing prevention systems, prosecuting human rights violations, or providing reparations to victims. Other influential actors, including embassies or international organisations, can also be mobilised to reinforce this pressure. Also, using widely recognised national or international legal frameworks helps legitimise the organisation’s work. This enhances its political weight and increases its credibility in the eyes of decision-makers. Referencing commonly accepted laws makes it more difficult for stakeholders to dismiss the organisation’s demands and can foster more productive dialogue.

Relevant international legal frameworks include the Geneva Conventions (International Humanitarian Law), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International

⁴ see section “Presentation to Policy Makers” for guidelines



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Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Conventions on the Right of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, along with other UN protocols and declarations. Regional frameworks are equally important and include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and other instruments supported by regional organisations like the EU, the OAS, and the AU. Jurisprudence and conventions from regional courts and commissions, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as soft law, also hold significant value. Additionally, bilateral agreements and domestic laws, policies, and regulations can serve as important advocacy tools.

Engagement with National and Local Authorities

This category of stakeholders includes national governments, parliaments, ministries, regional and local authorities, municipalities, regular armed forces, and administrative institutions at all levels. These actors may be essential for implementing a PbyP strategy in the cases they bear legal responsibility for protecting civil society. Their duties may include preventing violations, enforcing laws, prosecuting aggressors, and offering reparations to victims. They may also hold primary responsibility for building a society free from state-led or tolerated violence.

However, these same actors can sometimes be responsible for harm—either directly, through military or police aggression, or indirectly, through neglect or repressive legislation that undermines rights. Advocacy must therefore be both strategic and cautious, seeking engagement while acknowledging this potential dual role.

A powerful fulcrum is their concern with international image. Governments and institutions often aim to present themselves as safe, stable, and rights-respecting to attract international investment, tourism and support. This reputational sensitivity can be used to create political cost and enhance deterrence against violations, especially when PbyP presence is visible.

Advocacy efforts with national and local authorities should focus on diverse issues, including:

- Preventing their direct or indirect involvement in human rights violations.
- Promoting legal and policy reforms to ensure protection, prevention, and reparations.
- Bringing civil institutions closer to vulnerable or neglected areas.
- Ensuring access to complex areas for PbyP field missions and avoid actions that hinder their operations.

With military actors, the aim is to create both immediate and long-term deterrent effects. Local-level engagement can have short-term protective outcomes, while national-level advocacy targeting military leadership reinforces those efforts through hierarchical channels, increasing strategic impact.

Whether dealing with civilian or military actors, advocacy must be anchored in legal frameworks, national and international, that these authorities recognise and value. Not all legal

tools have equal weight; therefore, identifying and using those most relevant to the audience's strategic, political, or economic interests strengthens the organisation's position.

A strong support network further boosts the credibility and influence of the implementing organisation. Special attention should be given to diplomatic actors and embassies that publicly endorse the organisation's work. Demonstrating broad international backing and the ability to mobilise partners reinforces legitimacy and ensures institutional attention.

In preparing for advocacy engagements, it is vital to identify which allies can be mentioned or involved to support the organisation's claims and amplify its voice in key political or institutional arenas.

Engagement with Embassies, Foreign Governments, and Supranational Institutions

Embassies, foreign governments, and supranational institutions are among the most strategic actors for implementing protection initiatives. Their involvement is critical for securing funding, political endorsement, and increasing political cost for perpetrators. These actors often hold diplomatic leverage rooted in bilateral/multilateral agreements, geopolitical interests, and diplomatic relations with the host country and high public visibility.

Foreign governments and diplomatic missions shape their priorities based on strategic interests, such as access to resources, trade, regional stability, migration control, or the promotion of democracy and rule of law. Effective engagement begins with assessing each actor's specific motivations in the given context. Supranational institutions, like the European Union, African Union, or Organization of American States, present additional complexity, as internal dynamics and shifting member state priorities influence decision-making. Advocacy strategies must align with institutional mandates and political climates, while remaining adaptable to evolving interests.

Discourse must be tailored to political sensitivities and institutional cultures. Within each institution or foreign mission, there are varying degrees of openness to discussions around human rights, international humanitarian law, and civil society protection. Where appropriate, advocacy should directly address rights violations, threats to human rights defenders, or the vulnerability of local populations, supported by credible evidence from UN bodies, INGOs, and reliable sources.

In more restrictive contexts, advocacy messages may need to be reframed around widely accepted humanitarian concerns, such as child protection, civilian safety, or access to humanitarian aid. Appeals grounded in shared values like compassion or moral responsibility may also serve as effective entry points.

Where both rights-based and humanitarian messaging are ineffective, a third approach is to frame support for protection initiatives in terms of the foreign actor's own strategic interests. Advocacy can demonstrate how alignment with the implementing organisation supports broader goals like regional stability, governance, or development.



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Across all strategies, success relies on careful preparation, context-specific framing, and diplomatic tact. Building and maintaining strong relationships with embassies and international institutions enhances the organisation's legitimacy and advocacy impact at both national and global levels. Ongoing engagement, through regular updates, joint discussions, and identification of shared interests, ensures trust, credibility, and continued support. Sustained communication helps reinforce mutual commitment and strengthens long-term collaboration.

Engagement with UN System and International NGOs

International non-governmental organisations (iNGOs) and the UN system, including agencies, funds, committees, and peacekeeping or political missions, are key actors to involve in the support networks of implementing organisations. Strategic partnerships with these entities can enhance legitimacy with local and state actors, boost international visibility, and enable joint initiatives that expand reach and impact for vulnerable communities. These alliances are often more accessible than partnerships with state institutions, as they are built upon shared values such as humanitarian principles, solidarity, and human rights. Nonetheless, forming meaningful collaboration still requires thorough preparation and a well-crafted advocacy strategy.

A rights-based approach is essential when engaging these actors. This includes referencing relevant legal and policy instruments, both binding and non-binding, such as the Aarhus Convention, Paris Agreement, Escazú Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals, and the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Rights-based language is important at all levels. Where rights are already recognised in domestic law, UN actors are more inclined to support their implementation. Where they are not, the UN may still advocate for their recognition through soft diplomacy or policy recommendations.

Joint field missions with iNGOs or UN agencies can serve as powerful collaborative tools. These missions not only increase deterrence by consolidating political capital but also help build trust between organisations, align strategies, and improve coordination. However, careful consideration must be given to each participant's mandate, how they are perceived locally and how to better articulate capacities and strategies. Through their mandate, each organization maintains a unique relationship with local communities and other stakeholders, which can potentiate the impact and the success of the mission in various ways. This should be carefully considered during the preparation phase.

It is also important to acknowledge the diversity within the UN system. Peacekeeping and political missions, typically established by the UN Security Council, differ significantly from UN agencies and programmes in mandate and operations. Engagement with these missions requires understanding their political context, including the current Security Council composition and member state interests. In contrast, UN agencies operate under established mandates and programmatic guidelines. Successful engagement depends on aligning proposals with their institutional priorities. Furthermore, understanding the roles of political versus technical officers within these entities is crucial. Advocacy and communication



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strategies must be tailored to each audience to maximise impact and foster sustainable collaboration.

Ongoing relationship-building with international partners, grounded in shared values, legal frameworks, and strategic alignment, is essential for enhancing the credibility and influence of protection-by-presence efforts at all levels.

Engaging with religious leaders

Religious leaders, such as imams, rabbis, pastors, priests, bishops, and traditional or spiritual elders⁵, often play a central role in the social and political fabric of a region, particularly in conflict-affected settings. They are key actors to consider in both PbyP interventions and broader advocacy strategies due to the deep trust and moral authority they hold within their communities. This influence enables them to shape public opinion and behaviour, access sensitive local information, facilitate community acceptance of humanitarian actors, amplify protection messages, and act as mediators during periods of tension or violence. In some contexts, religious leaders have even actively participated in PbyP efforts with remarkable and inspiring results.

Given their influence, religious leaders can be powerful allies in advancing a PbyP strategy. The first step is to map both formal and informal religious leaders at local and national levels, ensuring representation of diverse faith groups in multi-religious areas. It is essential to analyse their networks, spheres of influence, and potential alliances or tensions with other actors.

Once relevant leaders have been identified, the next step is determining how to engage them effectively. Unlike state or institutional actors, religious leaders are typically not guided by legal frameworks such as international humanitarian law or national policies. Therefore, traditional legal or policy arguments may have limited impact. Instead, it is often more effective to frame protection goals in terms of shared spiritual values, such as compassion, peace, human dignity, and justice, and to use language and references that resonate with their specific faith traditions.

The nature of the relationship is as important as the content of the engagement. Because religious leaders often serve as moral and community guides, building a relationship based on mutual understanding, respect, and trust is critical. This cannot be achieved through a single meeting; it requires ongoing dialogue, humility, and active listening. PbyP organisations should recognize and affirm the legitimacy of their role, while also clearly presenting the PbyP approach as an additional tool for enhancing community protection.

Once a relationship has been established, religious leaders can become valuable partners in the field. They may collaborate in developing joint public messages to defend vulnerable populations or co-lead advocacy campaigns, helping to extend the reach and legitimacy of protection messaging. Moreover, religious leaders are often trusted by a wide range of actors,

⁵ This concept can be extended to clans and other social and extended family leaderships.

including armed groups, state forces, and non-state institutions, giving them access to both formal and informal communication channels. In some cases, they may even act as mediators or negotiators in peace processes. Their ability to bridge divides and facilitate dialogue can be instrumental in securing humanitarian access in areas where state or rebel groups are wary of external organizations.

However, as with any actor, engagement with religious leaders requires careful consideration. Their personal or institutional interests may not always align with humanitarian principles, and in some cases may directly contradict them. It is also crucial to understand the broader religious institutions or structures they belong to. While some local leaders may advocate for peace and human rights, the institutions they represent may promote more conservative or exclusionary agendas. In extreme but not uncommon cases, certain religious institutions or figures may align with new forms of fundamentalism. These new fundamentalisms are modern expressions of rigid, absolutist beliefs, often arising in reaction to social change, globalization, or perceived moral decline, that reject diversity and seek to impose a singular worldview. Such ideologies can foster exclusion, intolerance, or even violence.

For these reasons, engaging religious leaders in PbyP efforts requires a nuanced, context-specific approach, balancing opportunity with a clear-eyed assessment of risk, and always guided by the fundamental principles of the organisation.

Main Challenges

Understanding Protection by Presence (PbyP): One of the greatest challenges in advocating for PbyP is ensuring that various stakeholders comprehend its meaning and significance. This activity does not involve the provision of material goods, the construction of infrastructure, or the delivery of common services such as education, legal assistance, or medical care. Moreover, donors and institutions often associate the term "protection" with a range of specific activities such as child protection, gender-based violence, legal aid, or community-based protection. As a result, the value of PbyP may not be immediately evident, and it is susceptible to being easily misunderstood. This can lead to a lack of interest from stakeholders who fail to grasp its potential or added value.

The two core pillars of PbyP are the **dissuasive and deterrent effect** and **solidarity**. When explaining the first one, it is often mistakenly perceived as equivalent to bodyguard services or as a form of protection similar to that provided by private security companies⁶. The source of this misunderstanding could be the result of an underlying presumption that protection is a synonym of security, and that security is only ensured by armed forces (state or private). This presumption can also lead to the misunderstanding that PbyP officers are a sort of human

⁶ It must be noted that security companies and bodyguards intend to generate a deterrent effect, openly advertising that there are potential consequences. Similarly, the UN Peacekeeping missions create a deterrent effect carrying weapons, intended for restrictive defence use. In that sense, these approaches share a lot in common with PbyP. However, they emerge from different political and philosophical perspectives and should be clearly distinguished.

shields in conflict zones, which can make institutions to hesitate in offering political or financial support to organizations that appear to be endangering their personnel.

Solidarity, on the contrary, is easier to explain and generally understood. However, for many people, it remains an abstract concept, often perceived as offering only moral support without measurable outcomes. As a result, policymakers may fail to recognize the full potential and impact that the solidarity component can have on the populations it seeks to assist.

For these reasons, the presentation of PbyP is of utmost importance. Firstly, it must be simple, clear, and comprehensible (this means using accessible terminology), concise (so as not to take up valuable time that could be used for requests or strategies), and tailored to the audience (it is essential to deeply understand the individuals who will be addressed). Secondly, the presentation should be structured in a way that anticipates potential misunderstandings, in order to minimise them as much as possible.

Political Stance of the Organisation: Smaller organisations implementing Protection by Presence (PbyP) are often perceived as having a stronger and less neutral political stance than larger, traditional humanitarian actors. This perception arises from various factors. Firstly, the solidarity-based approach of these organisations can convey a more partisan image. Their extended presence and closer connection with communities, often without providing material aid, can be seen as excessive proximity, potentially undermining their image of impartiality and neutrality. Secondly, in armed conflict contexts, when an organisation is only allowed to engage with legally recognised armed actors and lacks a mandate to interact with groups labelled illegal or rebellious, it may be seen as partial by local communities or non-state armed groups. Additionally, many PbyP organisations stem from international solidarity movements and often involve individuals with politically or socially engaged backgrounds⁷. While this history can shape communication styles and narratives, it doesn't necessarily compromise their commitment to impartiality and professionalism. However, these origins may still contribute to external perceptions of reduced neutrality, especially compared to more traditional humanitarian actors.

These perceptions can pose major challenges, such as hindering dialogue with key stakeholders. If policymakers view an organisation as politically aligned, they may avoid engagement to prevent criticism or being seen as taking sides. This can lead to delays in meetings or reduced cooperation, even when meetings occur. The hesitation stems from fears of being perceived as biased or favouring a particular actor, which can damage their standing among other stakeholders.

To address these risks, organisations should:

- carefully manage political positioning to keep communication channels open and foster collaboration with all actors;

⁷ See Deliverable 5 - Differential approach + decolonisation for further discussion



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- ensure transparency and consistency in public messaging⁸, clarifying that working with communities does not equate to taking sides. Supporting human rights and protecting civilians must not be misread as a non-neutral stance;
- build a network of allies to reinforce the organisation's credibility and work. Engaging policymakers and other organisations through meetings can also enhance visibility and political leverage.

Difficulty in Effectively Influencing Protection Policy: advocating for the creation or improvement of laws and public policies related to protection presents significant challenges. Turning broad demands, such as better protection for civilians, into concrete legal or policy measures is complex and often frustrating. While this applies to many advocacy efforts, it is especially true in the realm of protection. Policymakers must balance competing pressures from political factions, corporations, the public, and various interest groups. Protection-focused advocacy, centred on defending civilian human rights, often clashes with dominant political or economic interests. As a result, proposals may be blocked or significantly diluted. Even when demands are well-formulated and backed by evidence, a lack of political will or urgency can prevent progress. Protection is frequently treated as a long-term issue, lacking the momentum for immediate legislative action. To overcome these obstacles, advocacy strategies must provide clear, evidence-based proposals, build political and public support, and skilfully navigate complex legal and policy systems.

Limited Access to High-Level Stakeholders: many organisations implementing Protection by Presence are small civil society groups with roots in international solidarity movements. In contrast, key decision-makers, such as donors, public institutions, and embassies, possess the authority to shape protection policy but are typically difficult to access. This mismatch between the limited capacity of these organisations and the influence held by policymakers presents a major challenge to shaping public policy or improving protection outcomes. In this context, networking is essential. It helps organisations gain political leverage, attract policymakers' attention, and build practical connections that facilitate access to influential stakeholders.

⁸ Refer to the Annex 3 - Manual of Proactive and Reactive messaging

Presentation to Policy Makers

This section is a guideline for the construction of a written concept note for policy makers, which needs to be adapted to the specific implementation, context and issues. However, this guideline can be helpful to prepare a meeting with the policymakers. In that case, the document and the conversation must complement each other and avoid repeating secondary information.

The concept note may have four parts:

- **Introduction.** Briefly explain the organisations mandate, interests and the purpose of the interaction. It helps setting a tone for the dialogue.
- **Framing the problem.** Explaining the need for protection in the specific context, using data and statistics from reliable⁹ sources.
- **Basics,** which presents in a clear and accessible manner what PbyP is (and what is not), explains how it works and shows its impacts through compelling stories.
- **Talking to the parties involved and gathering political support:** how to adapt the message based on the characteristics of the actor with whom it interacts.

As a general rule, the concept note has to be simple, short (maximum 3 pages long), accessible, clear and compelling.

Introduction

This part is the opportunity for the organisation to introduce their work, mandate and interests, as well as stating the purpose of the document. The image projected by the organisation in this section needs to be consistent¹⁰, but shaped accordingly to the individual it is directed to. In that sense, the description of the mandate, the principles and the narrative needs to be appealing and interesting, resonating with the values, principles and interests of the actor. The specifics of the PbyP strategy are not necessary here because they will be introduced later.

Framing the problem

Starting with a brief context analysis, describe the problem considering the following elements:

- **who is at risk, who are the aggressors and what are the impacts on the civilian population?** It is advisable to use an emblematic case that helps understand¹¹. This is an opportunity to explain the reinforcing loop from the systems thinking approach. Use statistics to show patterns in violence.

⁹ Take into consideration that sources should be perceived as reliable by the policymakers. Some policymakers may consider UN data and statistics the most reliable, whereas other actors would prefer civil society sources, or information from their own agencies.

¹⁰ See Annex 3: Manual of proactive and reactive messaging

¹¹ Especially if the emblematic case is widely known and has already a positive image.

- **How the population could benefit from Protection by Presence and how would that be of interest for the policymaker?** Through this connection, it is possible to show policymakers that their values and interests are addressed as well.
- **Refer to the local and/or international legal framework**, only if needed and if its clearly relevant to the particular policymaker. Take into consideration that bringing international obligations up can be counterproductive and adversely predispose the policymakers or, quite the opposite, could be a leverage for them.

Basics

What is Protection by Presence

Protection by presence is a strategy aimed at safeguarding the lives and civic space of communities, civil society organizations, and activists. By means of an intentionally designed visible presence dissuades or deters external actors from committing acts of violence and provides moral support, solidarity and encouragement.¹²

How It Works

At its core, PbyP works leveraging visibility, relationships, and external influence to change the cost-benefit analysis of those who might otherwise harm civilians or suppress civic space.

1. **Context and risk analysis, and mitigation strategies:** A thorough context analysis, involving local communities and other sources, is crucial to identify multiple intervening factors and potential trends that could affect the situation.
2. **Intentional physical presence:** presence is a type of advocacy-without-words that increases the anticipated political consequences of violent actions and/or induces a reduction of potential benefits of such actions, creating a need in the mind of the armed actor to recalculate the balance of cost and benefit. The decision to harm civilians never occurs in a vacuum: choices are always being made. Visible presence can achieve a deterrent or dissuasive impact because armed actors are rational decision-makers who consider the costs and benefits of their actions.
3. **Solidarity and encouragement:** Visible presence provides moral support, breaking feelings of isolation and enhancing community resilience.
4. **Comprehensive impact:** PbyP supports the physical and cultural survival of communities, helping them remain safely in their territories and continue to develop plans for long-term protection.
5. **Advocacy and capacity building:** PbyP strategies can include workshops on self-protection, advocacy, strategic communications, psychosocial support, legal aid, and other tools designed to strengthen the resilience of affected communities.

Ideally, an effective implementation should include diverse team with a mix of skills including human rights experts, humanitarian practitioners, gender experts, political officers, analysts,

¹² For more information, see the Deliverable 1 - PbyP definition.

and activists from around the world. These individuals are committed to civilian protection, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, strong analytical and communication skills, and experience in conflict resolution.

Effectiveness

Depending on their specific role, policymakers may be interested in understanding and learning about how effective PbyP is. Some policymakers may find a set of statistics the most appealing, while many will engage with a compelling story of change. These have to be short, meaningful and traceable, highlighting the implementing organisation's contribution. It is not necessary that they reflect big changes. On the contrary, it is crucial to trace all the small changes that an implementing organisation generates with its intervention. If the organisation is starting its first PbyP implementation and does not count with its own set of stories to show the potential impacts of an intervention, successful stories from other organisations, and even from other countries could be used.

Advocacy to support protection by presence

Depending on the role of the specific policymaker and their characteristics, the approach may include additional elements that could make the message more compelling.

Connecting with protection by presence actors

Embassies and government officials of foreign countries:

- The Protection by Presence (PbyP) strategy can significantly enhance the protection of civilians, civil society organizations, and activists in conflict zones. With over 40 years of well documented results, PbyP is a sustainable and adaptable strategy that expands the civic space, the safety and security of civilians who are at risk.
- Protection by Presence offers a promising approach to enhancing the safety of civilians and civil society in complex conflict zones. By supporting PbyP initiatives, it is possible to make significant strides in protecting vulnerable populations and fostering more resilient communities.
- Present emblematic cases to illustrate either successful outcomes (preferably from the same implementing organization) or particularly complex situations involving communities, regions, or individuals exposed to serious risks and in need of this type of protection. When selecting cases, try to choose those that have some connection to the stakeholder the organization is meeting with. The goal is to capture their interest and make the issue more relatable. For example, if meeting with an embassy, research their main policy priorities in the country, the areas they fund, and the topics they seek to explore further. Then, select a case that aligns with those interests to increase engagement and the potential for building a relationship.
- The needs of protection are expressed by the local communities. Any PbyP initiative must avoid a top-down or disempowering approach. Instead, it should be designed to reinforce and complement the community's own mechanisms and strengths. The

commitment of the implementing organization is to ensure that interventions are not imposed, but coordinated with the community, responding to their realities and aspirations. This is relevant and appealing to some actors like embassies and cooperation agencies who are interested in promoting localisation.

Humanitarian organizations and Peacekeeping Missions¹³:

- Emphasize that PbyP is a practical and principled method that directly supports core mandates such as the Protection of Civilians (PoC) policy of peacekeeping missions (e.g., DPO frameworks) and the IASC and Global Protection Cluster priorities for humanitarian actors. Highlight how PbyP translates high-level protection commitments into visible, grounded action that enhances credibility, increases access, and generates political consequences for violations, prompting both state and non-state actors to reconsider harmful behaviour due to increased visibility and coordinated international presence.
- The messaging should centre on the core principles of the implementing organisation, with particular emphasis on neutrality and impartiality, and the relevance of further cooperation, as PbyP is a coherent approach to fulfilling their fundamental commitments to protection.
- Provide examples of successful PbyP and humanitarian and peacekeeping missions collaborations, and extrapolate these experiences to the local situation. It is important to demonstrate that the work carried out through PbyP does not stand in contrast to the efforts of other humanitarian or peacekeeping actors. On the contrary, these different interventions can be mutually complementary, reinforcing each other's impact.
- Provide a clear explanation of how dissuasion and deterrence is achieved through presence: outline the political cost associated with violations in areas where presence is maintained. Stress that joint planning of activities can amplify this dissuasive and deterrent effect, as the combined political costs incurred by targeting multiple organisations create a more robust protective environment.

Advocating toward parties to the conflict

National Government and Local Authorities, Including the Regular Army

- Focus on introducing the organisation and explaining its mandate, principles and activities in a clear and pragmatic manner.
- Describe how the organisation conducts its operations in practice: that it maintains a highly visible presence on the ground, and that it systematically informs key local legal and administrative actors prior to undertaking any field missions. It is important to distinguish clearly between the implementing organisation and the local community.
- In case of meeting soldiers of the regular army in the field, it may not always be required a detailed explanation of the PbyP strategy. The primary objective is to ensure that armed actors perceive a potential political cost to harming or obstructing the organization, without stating this explicitly. Explaining the deterrent function of

¹³ Consult the section "Potential resistances & possible workarounds" from Deliverable 4 – Pitching PbyP for donors

presence too directly, such as outlining how the organization aims to prevent violence through visibility, can be interpreted as a challenge or threat, potentially provoking hostility or escalating tensions. Instead, by calmly and confidently introducing the organization, highlighting its humanitarian principles, and referencing its affiliations or support networks, a clear, indirect message is conveyed: any aggression toward the organization may carry consequences. This approach maintains neutrality and avoids confrontation, while still reinforcing the protective impact of the organization's presence.

- The implementing organisation's support network and its capabilities must be highlighted and visible. Clearly outline the organisation's role within this network and explain how its presence and activities are made visible. Particular attention should be given to actors that are especially relevant to the institution with which the meeting is taking place. Reference should be made to the legal framework governing the organisation's operations. This includes national laws as well as any international conventions, agreements, or legal instruments that underpin its work and to which the relevant government institution is a signatory or otherwise bound.
- Where relevant, if the government is supporting a peace or negotiation process, demonstrate how the work of the implementing organisation contributes positively to and reinforces that process. In engagements with military forces, take into consideration the chain of command and highlight the regular dialogue maintained the higher ranks, whether through the commanders, the Ministry of Defence, or another relevant governmental authority.

Non-Conventional Armed Actors (e.g. illegal groups, rebel or insurgent groups, organised criminal groups)

- Focus the communication on presenting the implementing organization: its identity, mandate, guiding principles, and the broader network of actors that support its work. Also in this case, for the same reason mentioned before, there is no requirement to explain the PbyP strategy in detail, for the same reasons explained before with the regular army. The core idea is to show the political cost without saying it explicitly in order to avoid potential escalation.
- Clarify that the role of the implementing organisation is to stand alongside the civilian population who have chosen to adopt non-violent means of resistance as a way of life.
- It is important to make clear and consistent reference to International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, and any other relevant international legal frameworks that may be known or acknowledged by the armed group in question.
- It is important to analyse and carefully consider what information and how to convey it. For example, while the PbyP organisation have communication with regular state forces, in countries where the interaction with illegal groups is criminalised, the fundamental principle of neutrality might be perceived as weak by the illegal armed actors, thus inducing potential risks. In such cases, the PbyP organisation should strengthen the image of neutrality.

Foreign governments and military forces during an invasion



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- A detailed explanation of the PbyP intervention, mandate and principles, highlighting the neutrality and impartiality, but stressing the concerns on human rights and IHL violations.
- Clearly explain that the organisation members are always wearing visible and distinctive symbols.
- Focus on the protection of civilians as the main concern.
- Use the international legal framework to conduct the exchange and avoid sharing information on the other parties.
- It may not be possible to extrapolate experiences from other places, so it is important to study the actors in advance, and learn from other experiences. In that sense, having an understanding on the geopolitics can be of use for tracing a strategy.